

SPECIALTY OF THE HOUSE

Resources for Supporting the APA Publication Style

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ABSTRACT

Hospital library users often use library resources for doing research for scholarly and professional writing projects. Citations and format style for academic papers and publications must often conform to the “APA Style”, found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. This publication manual is among the pantheon of standard publication manuals on library reference shelves, including the American Medical Association Manual of Style, The Chicago Manual of Style, and Turabian’s “Manual for Writers”. The APA style is prominently used in social sciences and many nursing and allied health publications. Hospital librarians may be asked for advice on formatting manuscripts and citations, and should know more about the APA style, supporting resources, and where to turn for authoritative information on its rules.

Key words: APA Style, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Nurses, Authors, Writing, Publications.

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ABOUT THE APA STYLE

“APA Style” is commonly used to refer to the rules for formatting publications, set forth in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) (1). The current edition is the 5th edition, published in 2001 (\$27.95, paperback). Style guidelines for electronic resources were updated in 2007 with the publication of the *APA Style Guide for Electronic References*, which is published in downloadable PDF format (\$11.95, or site license) (2). These two manuals provide rules, guidelines, and examples for planning the writing of manuscripts and citing sources for the publications of the APA. More information about the APA style, frequently asked questions, the 2007 update for electronic references, and examples of APA citations are published on the APA Style web site (3). Users of the APA Publication Manual, 5th Edition, will also want to download the 5 page PDF document, “Reprint Corrections”, which correct errors found in the 2001 publication (4). Users should also be aware that the 2002 APA Ethics Code changes the 1992 code used in the *Publication Manual*. The editorial staff of the APA report that a 6th edition is not currently being planned as of this writing.

The APA style is widely used in the social sciences, and has also been adopted by Nursing and other allied health professions, especially for academic and research writing. The *Publication Manual* provides guidance to authors on the process of writing manuscripts, especially for those reporting research results. The guidelines standardize the way data and ideas that comprise the ongoing professional dialogue on the theory and practice of these disciplines are communicated. The APA publication manual not only sets forth rules for references and in line citations, it also deals with ethical issues such as plagiarism and the issue of copyright. The nitty gritty issues of margins, font size, and pagination are also spelled out in detail. The critical

issues of determining authorship, and dealing with racial, ethnic, sexual, and disability biases are also addressed in the manual as well as the web site.

Authors of manuscripts should follow the instructions for authors which are unique to the journal they are writing for, and these might not always be the APA publication rules. It may be the case that authors should use the APA format for cited references and a reference list, but the format of the manuscript itself will use different standards. The rules for academic papers submitted to instructors may differ from the “official” APA style, so students doing academic papers should always ask the instructor what they want if it is not specified on the course syllabus. For example, the APA formatting rules for manuscripts specify a “running header” for each page; but instructors might not want this for paper assignments.

Ideally, writers will want to buy their own copies of the APA publication manual and the APA style guide for electronic references, but they are also likely to look to librarians for assistance. Librarians need not become APA style experts, but it will be useful to know general information about APA style, become familiar with a few “go to” sources to answer specific questions, and some rules of thumb.

FORMATTING SOFTWARE

There is no “magic wand” for turning out proper APA formatted papers and cited references. There are some great electronic tools on the writer’s market, and more seem to appear every day. Some of these tools are free and open access, and some of them are published by commercial vendors, but each has a learning curve and cost/benefit equation which should be considered. Whatever technological supports are used, in the end, the author is responsible for knowing APA style and for checking to make sure the rules are followed.

A template of an APA paper for Microsoft Word 2007 can be found on the Microsoft Office web page and downloaded (5). University and college academic writing center web pages are likely to have templates available for downloading for Word 2007 and older versions. The Governors State University GROWL (GSU Regional Online Writing Lab) web site has templates which can be downloaded and used (6).

Microsoft Word 2007 offers tools for citing resources in APA style and formatting reference pages, but each citation must be typed in manually. The APA publishes the *APA Style Helper 5.1* (\$35.95) which offers similar features, but this is not compatible with Word 2007 (7). Zotero is a free open source plug-in tool for Microsoft Word, but only works with the Firefox web browser (8). As is the case with Word 2007, Zotero creates a local database of citations which can be used when actually writing an article. Zotero has the additional feature of capturing data from web pages, including research databases such as CINAHL™ and JSTOR, and importing it into the local user citation database.

Bibliographic management software such as Procite™, Reference Manager™, and EndNote™, components of Thomson Scientific's ResearchSoft suite of tools, are helpful but are products for stand-alone workstations (9). RefWorks™ (10) and EndNote Web™ (9) are hosted on vendor mainframe servers and are accessible via the web. These products have a steep learning curve, but enable the writer to maximize time and effort by exporting citations directly from databases such as CINAHL™ and online library catalogs. Plug-in tools for Microsoft Word enable the writer to access their personal citations lists and import them into their manuscript. Reference pages are automatically formatted in standard APA format. These tools save a lot of typing effort, and are indispensable for managing citations and bibliographies. In

addition, formats can be modified to include elements such as call number, notes, and other non-standard citation data. These products might also be considered in lieu of a library catalog.

RefWorks™ is available for institutional licensing and IP range authentication, making the cost per student or employee very reasonable; but one must calculate the cost/use benefit and evaluate the likelihood of institution-wide usage. The GSU Library subscribed to RefWorks™ for a year, but did not renew due to low utilization rates among faculty, staff, and students. Recently, RefWorks™ initiated a personal subscription option for about \$100 per year.

Many library bibliographic databases and resources now offer the ability to display appropriate citation formats for that bibliographic item. For example, Ebsco™ and Proquest™ give the option to save or email search results in the appropriate APA style, and the option to display citations in various publication styles while browsing search results. Look for the “cite this article” icon in search results. Library catalogs also offer this option. OCLC’s WorldCat, the world’s largest library catalog, now offers a bibliography building feature, which can be useful for gathering all the data needed for a complete APA citation (11). Users of electronic reference books should look for examples of how to cite that resource on that publication’s web page. Again, users need to be cautioned that the exported citations need to be carefully reviewed for accuracy and completeness.

TEACHING AND LEARNING THE APA STYLE

Governors State University Library faculty occasionally are called upon to provide instruction on APA style for Nursing, Psychology, and Education programs. A PowerPoint presentation tutorial was developed and is published on the library’s “Writing a Research Paper” resources web page (12). This presentation is customized for specific classes. Course instructors at GSU ask for librarian facilitated instruction on APA as “preventive medicine” prior to the

class's first research paper assignment. Students receive a handout of the presentation, which gives page numbers they can refer to in their own APA publication manuals. Librarians and instructors collaborate to highlight problem areas that students typically have with APA style.

The GSU library purchased a site license for the 2007 APA supplement for electronic resources, and placed the 29 page PDF file on our Journals/Databases A-Z page behind a proxy server. Authorized GSU users can download and print their own copy, if they wish. Librarians demonstrate how to do this in bibliographic instruction sessions. The library has also printed out print copies for each of library copies of the APA Publication manual, 5th Edition, and placed them behind the Reference desk for library user.

The Publication Manual of the APA is primarily a reference book, to be consulted in the course of writing a manuscript and formatting reference lists. The publisher doesn't expect that it will be read from cover to cover and memorized. The APA publishes a companion book for learning the APA Style, *Mastering APA Style: Student's Workbook and Training Guide*. (13) This publication is intended to be a self-study course, as well as a course text for learning APA style. This text seems most appropriate for those preparing dissertations, or preparing to become journal editors.

Multimedia tutorials on APA Style can be found online using Google. A good example of an up-to-date tutorial is found at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education (14). Several are easily located using Google's You Tube, and seem authoritative. College and university writing center web pages can also be helpful for finding examples, in addition to the APA Style web page itself. Diana Hacker's Research and Documentation Online web page (15) and Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (16) are among the better known and respected free online resources.

CONSULTING ON APA QUESTIONS

The GSU library has a collaborative partnership with the university's writing lab. Writing assistance is provided in the library 20 hours a week on a drop in basis by writing tutors, who typically are graduate students at the university. More in-depth assistance is provided to students by scheduling an appointment with a writing tutor outside of the library hours. Students can also email papers to the writing center for review and comment; and the writing center is experimenting with online chat room appointments using the online course platform. University Library reference librarians and staff assist writers with general APA Style questions using reference resources, but defer to the writing center tutors if the student has time and tutors are available.

While we all appreciate the ability to go to an expert, the APA Publication Manual itself does not claim to have an answer for every situation. The Publication Manual advises that the writer look for the closest related example of how to cite using the material. When in doubt, the Manual counsels to error on the side of providing too much information, rather than not enough. The purpose of providing a reference list is to enable the reader to locate the sources used in the publication, so completeness and accuracy are critical.

Hospital librarians may be called upon to support and facilitate scholarly and professional writing of house staff, physicians, medical students, and nursing and allied health personnel. Hospitals who are applying for Magnet Hospital designation from the American Nurses' Credential Center of the American Nurses Association will be encouraging and supporting their nurses' writing and publishing activities. Consider contacting your local university, college, or

community college writing center to determine their capacity and willingness to support non-students, and to collaborate with you.

CONCLUSION

Rules and guidelines for writers will continue to change as new technologies transform scholarly and professional communications. Recent editions of publication manuals tackle email, podcasts, blogs, instant messaging, and other new media. Recognizing that providing support to writers might appear overwhelming, hospital librarians will want to keep abreast of developments of software solutions such as ProCite, Refworks, and developments in word processing such as Microsoft Word. Hospital librarians can begin meeting this challenge by keeping their library reference collection current with standard publication manuals, and monitoring the publishers' web sites for errata and updates.

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